

IN RECOGNITION OF LIEUTENANT COLONEL LISA L.A. EPPERSON

(Mr. BACON asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. BACON. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize Lieutenant Colonel Lisa L.A. Epperson on the occasion of her retirement from the United States Air Force, the best Air Force in the world.

Colonel Epperson has given a great deal to this Nation through her service. Her assignments include Wright-Patterson, Tyndall, Los Angeles, Hill, and Nellis Air Force Bases, and finally here at the Pentagon. Colonel Epperson has influenced mission systems from Defense Satellite Communications System and Minuteman III, an ICBM, to the F-15 and F-22. Most importantly, she impacted our warfighting operations in Operations Noble Eagle, Enduring Freedom, and Iraqi Freedom.

Throughout her distinguished career, Colonel Epperson represented our country with honor, and I am privileged to pay tribute to her. On behalf of Congress and the United States, I want to thank Colonel Epperson; her husband, David; and their children, Trevor and Cassidy, for their 20 years of service. I wish them Godspeed and continued happiness as they start this new chapter.

CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2017, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. SMUCKER) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. SMUCKER. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the topic of this Special Order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Pennsylvania?

There was no objection.

Mr. SMUCKER. Madam Speaker, tonight I am honored to lead a bipartisan Special Order on career and technical education. We have several Members joining us here this evening to highlight CTE programs in their districts and the upcoming reauthorization of the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act.

I would like to start the order by yielding to my colleague and colead, Congressman KRISHNAMOORTHY, who has been working hard with my Pennsylvania colleague, Congressman THOMPSON, on H.R. 2353, the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act.

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHY. Madam Speaker, I thank Representative SMUCKER for yielding. I really appreciate his leadership. I thank Congress-

man G.T. THOMPSON from Pennsylvania as well for his leadership. It is an honor to be here.

Madam Speaker, in recent years, global economic trends have led to an ever-growing skills gap. While unemployment has fallen to 4.4 percent in my home State of Illinois, there is still a widening gap between the jobs that are open and the skills workers need. This has become apparent as I have traveled throughout my district listening to community representatives, businesses, parents, students, and higher education officials discuss the local state of the economy.

I have been particularly concerned with the feedback I have received from businesses, who continue to report that there is a gap between the talent and skills they need in employees and what they can actually find. Shortages in skilled fields like machinists, technicians, operators, cybersecurity, and healthcare are impairing their ability to grow their businesses.

There is much Congress can do to improve the skills of our labor force, which is why I was proud to partner with my good friend and fellow member of the Education and the Workforce Committee, Congressman G.T. THOMPSON, in introducing H.R. 2353.

Our bill reauthorizes the Carl D. Perkins grant program through fiscal year 2023 and gives States and local governments the tools to better equip workers for higher paying middle class jobs in the 21st century.

The Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act addresses one of the underlying causes of the skills gap: what is being taught in classes does not necessarily sync up with what is needed to get a job. H.R. 2353 requires a strong buy-in from local businesses in developing State plans.

With more local stakeholders involved in the process, it will better equip students with the technical skills they need to find success in local in-demand careers.

Finally, I believe it is important that we start to shift the culture surrounding career and technical education. Every student, no matter his or her career goals, should participate in some form of career education. I believe that every student needs to graduate, not just with a diploma but with another piece of paper, namely an offer letter.

Some students will find success in a traditional 4-year college program; others, however, will learn the skills they need through a 2-year community college or on-the-job training.

I look forward to working with my colleagues from both sides of the aisle to ensure its passage, and I look forward to sending this bill to the President later this year for signing.

Mr. SMUCKER. Madam Speaker, I would like to thank Congressman KRISHNAMOORTHY for his leadership on this issue. The Congressman is a fellow member of the freshman class. I really

appreciate the opportunity to work with him, particularly on this very important topic.

Madam Speaker, I yield to Congressman THOMPSON, the sponsor of H.R. 2353, who, for many years, has been leading the charge here in the House to strengthen career technical education.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Madam Speaker, I thank my good friend from Pennsylvania, Representative SMUCKER—he is doing a great job representing his congressional district and being a strong voice for Pennsylvania—for hosting this important Special Order tonight focused on career and technical education.

I appreciate my good friend, Representative KRISHNAMOORTHY, who is with me and is leading the charge with the piece of legislation that I hope we will see on the House floor in the weeks to come.

As co-chair of the House Career and Technical Education Caucus, I often say that a high quality career in technical education can help restore rungs on the ladder of opportunity. Now, this statement is one I truly believe in.

For many Americans, those rungs have been displaced for different reasons, whether it is training that they have had, access to training, access to quality, effective training; whether it has been poverty; whether it has been unemployment, underemployment, all things that take away rungs on the ladder of opportunity, this career and technical education can truly restore rungs on the ladder of opportunity.

It is undeniable that career and technological education has helped many Americans obtain the knowledge and skills they need to break the cycle of poverty and achieve a lifetime of success.

The first step to increasing access to CTE programs, as we refer to them, across the United States is modernizing the Federal investment in these programs, and it has been more than a decade since Congress has updated the Federal law governing CTE programs. This is problematic, due to the fact that so much about our society and our Nation's workforce has changed during this time. Since the last time the Perkins Act was reauthorized, we have new skill sets, new jobs, new industry, new opportunities, new technology.

So, for example, today, more than 1 million positions remain open in the trade, transportation, utility sectors, and an additional 315,000 manufacturing positions are currently unfilled. If we are to embark on a new era of American manufacturing and improved infrastructure, we need a qualified and well trained workforce to fill these positions. That is the number one asset of any business. It is not the location; it is not the compliance; it is not the marketing. It really is a qualified and trained workforce.

With all this in mind, I have worked with my colleagues in introducing the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act